

Congressman Baird's Statement in Support of the Iraq Supplemental (March 23, 2007)

Washington, D.C. - Today, Congressman Brian Baird (WA-03) voted to change strategic course in Iraq by voting in favor of the U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Health and Iraq Accountability Act. Below is his statement:

No votes in Congress are more wrenching or difficult than those involving war; whether that vote involves initiating combat, or in this instance, steps to bring about the end. The consequences are profound, uncertainty about the right course is great, and there are strong feelings on all sides.

Every member of Congress is committed to the security of this nation and to supporting our troops and their families. There are legitimate differences about how best to achieve those goals, but the core commitment to security and to support of our troops should not be doubted or questioned, regardless of where one stands on this matter.

Before the first vote authorizing force in Iraq in 2002, I asked fundamental questions of the President: What will the cost be in human casualties on all sides? What are the international and potential regional scenarios that might be developed? What is our long term strategy for the region? I also asked about the economic costs to our nation and the world, and about the likelihood of religious conflicts leaving our soldiers caught between warring religious factions with grievances that are centuries old. I asked what provisions had been made to care for the wounded and their families when they return? I called for greater commitment to resolving the Israeli/Palestinian issues and for reducing our nation's dependence on petroleum. Finally, knowing well the history of the region, I asked how long our commitment was expected to last if hostilities were initiated.

Not one of these questions was answered by President Bush, Secretary Rumsfeld or any member of the Administration. That is why I voted No on that initial resolution. Sadly, the same questions remain today and they have still not been answered by the President, which is why I will vote Yes on the bill before the House today.

For the sake of our nation's security, for the safety of our troops, for the sake of our economy at home, for the sake of our international standing, we must say to the Iraqi leaders and to the world, We have removed a dictator from power, we have disarmed a tyrant, elections have been held, and a constitution is in place. We have shed the blood of our finest, we have indebted our children, we have tried to help rebuild infrastructure and put in place the basis of a democratic republic. Now, it is up to the Iraqi people themselves to find a political solution that is in everyone's interest and will lead to an end to the bloodshed. Our nation cannot and should not attempt to impose that solution indefinitely; it must come from the Iraqis themselves.

Today's bill says just that. It provides the necessary funds to continue to support our soldiers in the field. It adds much needed resources to ensure they receive care when they come home. It addresses needed priorities within our own nation. And, most importantly, it says affirmatively, there will be an end to our role in combat in Iraq and it is time for our nation, for the Iraqis, and for the world, to begin to prepare for that time. This cannot go on forever.

Those who talk about staying the course without end, as well as those who would call for opposing this bill because they want the war to end tomorrow, must all recognize that in the process of this conflict, our overall military readiness has been profoundly impaired and our nation is now vulnerable should other, more severe, threats emerge elsewhere in the world. At the same time, our local preparedness of the National Guard is in tatters. Our Guard lacks key resources, equipment, and manpower to respond to fires, floods, or other disasters or to join in serious conflicts elsewhere if called upon to do so. This bill, quite rightly, seeks to correct these deficits.

The reality before us today is that we cannot immediately stop funding for our forces or neglect the readiness deficits that now endanger our nation. That would be irresponsible and would leave our soldiers on the ground and our citizens at home and abroad in greater danger. It would also endanger the lives and hopes of the Iraqi people themselves and leave them vulnerable to extremists and chaos.

At the same time, however, it would be equally irresponsible to allow this hemorrhaging of blood and money, this neglect of our own nation's needs here at home, to continue unchecked. This legislation changes the direction for our nation and says the Iraqis must change the direction of their nation. They must take responsibility for their own security, share their oil wealth equitably with their own citizens, and establish fundamental constitutional reforms. This bill requires that our President must certify that such things are being done.

Far from tying the hands of the President, this legislation gives him much needed direction. If it becomes law, President Bush must at long last say that his own people, the American people, in the constitutional democratic republic that is our nation, and that he is sworn to defend, have spoken through their representatives and have said it is time for change. It will soon be up to the Iraqis themselves to determine the fate of their own nation so that we can, at long last, may again determine the fate of ours.

If you care about the security of this nation, vote Yes to restore our military readiness. If you care about our soldiers, vote Yes to give them the equipment they need while deployed and the care they need when they return home. If you want to see an end to this conflict, vote Yes to begin the process that will bring that about.

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